

Parton apologises for saying gay Greens candidate 'too camp for Tuggeranong'


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Subscriber



 Greens candidate for Brindabella Johnathan Davis. Picture: Elesa Kurtz
Liberal Mark Parton has apologised to a gay Greens candidate after he told him he wouldn't win a seat at next month's ACT election because he was "too camp for Tuggeranong".

The Greens' lead candidate in the southern suburbs seat of Brindabella, Johnathan Davis, said Mr Parton made the comment while the election opponents were campaigning at Kambah shops on Saturday.

Mr Davis has stressed he did not think Mr Parton was homophobic, but said it was concerning his opponent believed his sexuality would be a factor in how people voted.

"Mark and I have got to know each other quite well over the years and we were having an honest back-and-forth conversation," Mr Davis said, recounting Saturday's incident.

"He made the comment that while I'm a nice bloke I probably wouldn't win because I'm too camp for Tuggeranong."

Mr Davis said he initially laughed off the comments, as he said he often did when similar remarks had been made in the past.

But Mr Davis said Mr Parton's comment lingered with him over the course of the weekend, before a homophobic attack on his Facebook page prompted him to speak out.

In a highly offensive comment posted on Mr Davis's page, an account under the name "Max Sterphen" wrote Mr Parton was a much better candidate and Tuggeranong didn't need "lgbt f***** painting it in rainbow and thinking you're on top of the world".

The same Facebook account has made homophobic comments to Labor candidate Maddy Northam.



📷 Liberal Mark Parton. Picture: Jamila Toderas

The account carried as its profile picture an advertisement for the Canberra Liberals' pledge to plant 1 million trees if elected on October 17.

The Liberals have distanced themselves from the account, which they believed was fake. The opposition has observed similarities in the language used by "Max Sterphen" and other fake social media accounts which have been attacking or impersonating Liberal MLAs while using party branding.

The "Max Sterphen" account appeared to have been deleted when *The Canberra Times* searched Facebook on Monday morning.

Mr Davis wrote a Facebook post on Sunday drawing attention to both Mr Parton's comments and the "Max Sterphen" post.

Mr Davis told *The Canberra Times* Mr Parton was a "good person" and not homophobic, and his comment outside Kambah shops were not the same as those made by "Max Sterphen".

But Mr Davis said there was a degree of similarity between the two comments.

"Both people felt comfortable citing my sexuality as justification for electoral support," he said.

"If we want to break down that stigma, then both have to be called out - even if there are very different."

As well as being offensive, Mr Davis believed Mr Parton's comments showed a lack of insight as to how tolerant and socially progressive voters in Canberra's south were.

The Canberra Times contacted Mr Parton for comment.

In a statement, his spokeswoman said Mr Parton had apologised to Mr Davis.

Mr Davis contested Brindabella for the Greens at the 2016 ACT election, winning 1.5 per cent of the vote.

He also stood as the party's candidate in the seat of Bean at the 2019 federal election, where he collected 13 per cent of votes to finish third behind Labor's Dave Smith and Liberal Ed Cocks.

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